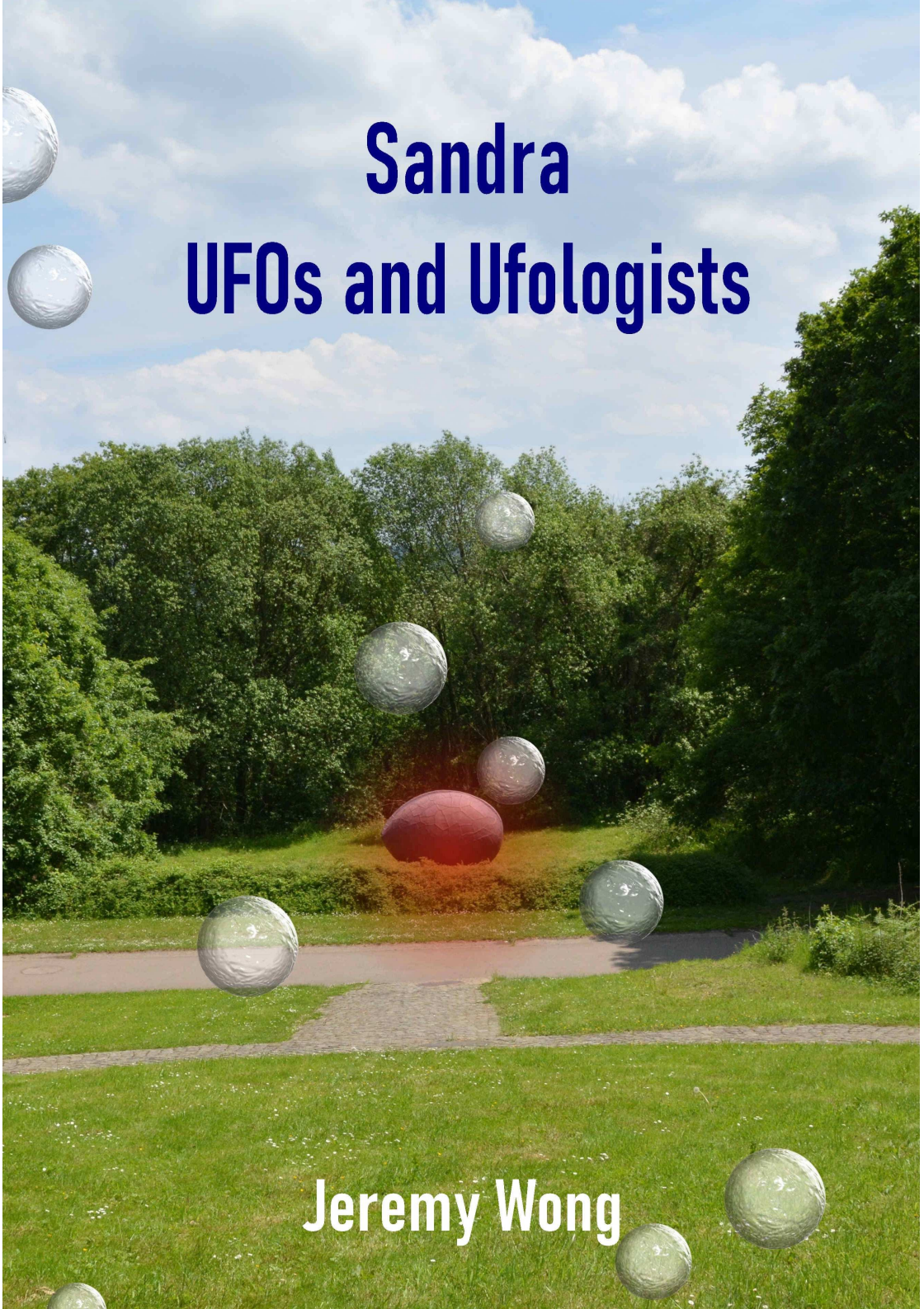
Sandra
UFOs and Ufologists



Jeremy Wong

Inside front cover

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Jeremy Wong

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originally written in French,
revised and corrected by the author
with the assistance of ChatGPT.
The reader is therefore kindly asked to excuse
any errors in spelling, punctuation, or style
that may still remain.

August 2026

CHAPTER 1

Dressed entirely in denim and wearing sneakers, Sandra strode briskly across the newsroom, then set down on her desk the tripod and camera that never left her whenever she went out on assignment. And that very day, she had just returned from interviewing a young woman who made her own beauty products.

She was about to open her computer and start writing her article when she received an internal phone call.

— Hello, Sandra? Marcel here. Come to my office.
— OK, boss.

Sandra knew that from his glass-walled office, the editor-in-chief could see everything going on in the newsroom. He had probably noticed her arrival. She also knew he did not like to be kept waiting. So she put her jacket over the back of her chair and headed straight for the

office the call had come from.

— Come in and sit down. I suppose you've just come back from an assignment?
— Yes, a nice lady who makes her own makeup products. Frankly, I wouldn't want to put that stuff on my face, but it's very trendy these days because it's part of some sort of back-to-nature movement.
— Trendy, trendy! Every kind of nonsense is trendy nowadays! People are going crazy, I keep saying it all the time. Well, I'm going to tell you about another trend…
— Oh yeah? What?
— UFOs.
— UFOs? You're kidding me?
— Not at all. You may not know it, but back when Trump was still president and dark clouds were beginning to gather over him, he had a brilliant idea for making headlines and diverting the media's attention away from himself: he thought of UFOs. He had his henchmen dig up some obscure radar-echo affair that had been closed without further action, and it was immediately fed to the media as an extraordinary UFO sighting. It triggered such a media storm that a congressional inquiry committee was set up, and NASA then rushed into the breach thus opened. The result was that UFOs, which by then only video-game enthusiasts still cared about, resurfaced, if I may put it that way, and heaps of articles about them began appearing again. We're just about the only ones who haven't published anything on the subject yet.
— Well, maybe that's not such a bad thing…
— Maybe, but the press, as you know, has to pay attention

to which way the wind is blowing. We have to follow the trends, as you put it…
— Still, there are limits…
— Bah, bah, bah. We're not going to start some ethical and philosophical debate about it, are we? Anyway, I've decided you're going to do a feature on the subject.
— Me? But I don't know anything about it! My field, as you know, is fashion, beauty products—not extraterrestrials!
— Well, this will be your chance to learn your trade by plunging into something completely different from your usual subjects. You're young and dynamic, you have quite a way with words, and what's more, your looks are enough to make even the grumpiest ufologist warm to you.
— The grumpiest what?
— Ufologist. That's how the men and women who claim to study UFOs refer to themselves.
— Well, you learn something new every day. And where does that strange word come from?
— Quite simply from UFO, which stands for Unidentified Flying Object. From UFO came ufologist, ufology, UFO maniac, UFO enthusiast, and so on.
— Well, who would have thought…
— Anyway, I want you to come up with something solid on the subject. About ten pages in which you describe the little world of ufologists and their ideas, whatever they may be, while weighing up how solid their arguments are. A good overview of the whole question, basically. I'm counting on you to mix your usual humor into it, but also some extremely solid analysis. It should be enjoyable to read while offering serious conclusions worthy of our publication. I won't keep you. Do your best, but try to have

it finished within two weeks.
— Well, I certainly wasn't expecting that…
— But that's journalism, Sandra: always be ready to cover the news that imposes itself on you—or doesn't. Off you go. You should already be chomping at the bit!

Sandra returned to her desk. She sat down and remained thoughtful for a moment, slightly stunned. Then she had an idea. She picked up the phone and called her cousin, a young astrophysicist she got along with very well.

— Hello, Kenny, is that you? It's Sandra.
— Ah, Sandra. What brings you my way?
— Am I bothering you?
— No, not at the moment. I don't have to teach a cosmology class for another hour. What can I do for you?
— Well, I've got a problem. My editor-in-chief has just assigned me a feature on UFOs and the people who deal with them—the info-longists, I think.
— No, ufologists. Hahaha! Well, Sandra, have a nice trip to the madhouse.
— What do you mean?
— I mean that with a subject like that and people like those, you haven't heard the last of nonsense and lunacy of every kind.
— Now you're making me fear the worst.
— And you'd better be prepared for it, sweetheart.
— Come on, be serious. Where—or with what—would you advise me to start on this subject you seem to know something about? I'm completely lost when it comes to all this.

— All right. Listen, I think the best thing I can suggest for the moment is that you contact S… D… on my behalf. He knows the subject inside out and will probably be able to help you even better than I can. Hang on, I'll give you his contact details…

CHAPTER 2

— Hello? Is this S… D…?
— Speaking.
— Good morning, sir. My cousin Kenny, who's an astrophysicist, suggested I contact you because he thought you might be able to help me.
— Go ahead.
— Well, here's the situation: I'm a journalist, but I specialize mainly in fashion. Now my editor-in-chief has just assigned me an article about UFOs and the people who specialize in them—ufologists, which I assume you are.
— I used to be, but I'm not anymore.
— Oh… Still, my cousin thinks you could be of considerable help to me. I'm completely new to all this, I know nothing about it, and I've been asked to write an article about these people and the subject they're interested in. You can easily understand why I feel completely lost.
— I can certainly imagine. And what kind of article are you

supposed to write?
— My editor-in-chief wants me to describe the little world of these ufologists, their ideas and theories, and to offer some conclusions as to the value of it all.
— Interesting, if it's done seriously.
— Hey, I'm a serious journalist, believe me. And all I want is precisely to write a serious article. Will you help me?
— You sound like a pleasant young woman, and if your cousin, whom I know well, recommended you to me, I have every reason to believe that you are indeed concerned with doing a good job.
— Thank you, that's kind of you. I already feel a little reassured…
— Listen, here's what I suggest: I'll give you the addresses of a few ufologists. All you have to do is go and interview them, but don't tell them that you contacted me. You'll understand why later. Then get back in touch with me and we'll discuss it together. Agreed?
— Great! Yes, agreed. I'm taking notes…
— Wait until I open my hard drive and find the right place.

A moment passed, then the man began dictating a series of names and addresses. Finally, he concluded:

— There. I think those people are fairly representative of the circles you've been asked to describe and of the ideas they defend. No doubt they'll drown you under a flood of arguments they regard as proof. We'll go over all that together afterward.
— OK. I'll start hunting them down right away. Thanks again.

Sandra reread the list. She picked a name at random and tried calling.

— Good morning, sir. I'm a journalist and I'm interested in UFOs. I was told that you're a specialist in the field…
— Indeed I am… and one of the best, at that.
— Ah, then I've come to the right person. Would you agree to give me an interview?
— Of course. I'd be delighted to teach you all sorts of things about the subject that you undoubtedly don't know.
— Well, when could I see you?
— Today, if you wish. Do you have my address?
— Yes, it isn't too far from where I am.
— Well then, I'll be expecting you.
— Great. Thank you so much. I'll get there as quickly as I can.

Sandra put her jacket back on, grabbed her camera equipment, and headed for the exit. She practically ran to her car, set the GPS, and drove off.

CHAPTER 3

The house in front of which the young journalist stopped was a substantial middle-class house surrounded by railings and a small garden. She walked along a poorly maintained path, climbed the front steps, and rang the bell. She listened. Inside, she heard footsteps. A silhouette appeared behind the frosted glass pane in the front door. When it opened, an average-sized, rather clumsy-looking man appeared, his face almost swallowed up by a full beard running around his jaw.

The man, perhaps around sixty, looked the young mixed-race woman with long black hair up and down. She was not very tall, but she was slim and shapely. Beneath her denim jacket she wore only a simple white top that hugged her generous breasts and left much of her stomach and navel bare. She was not heavily made up, but there was something about her large, sparkling eyes that immediately

caught one's gaze.

— Are you the journalist? Please come in.

The man motioned for the young woman to follow him and entered what looked like a living room cluttered with mismatched furniture and ornaments of such wildly different styles that the overall effect was decidedly one of bad taste. He motioned for Sandra to sit on a yellow sofa upholstered in worn velvet and seated himself in a cracked red leather armchair directly opposite her. It was then that Sandra noticed that the man had a peculiar tic that periodically twisted his mouth.

— Do you mind if I record our interview on video?
— How?
— Well, with my camera, which I'll mount on a tripod.
— Really? You don't need a video camera to make a video?
— No, my still camera does that very well.
— Oh, really. Well, go ahead if it's useful to you.

It took Sandra only two minutes to set up the tripod, mount her camera on it, and start recording. She immediately sat down and, full of energy, launched into her first question:

— So, I wanted to ask you whether you believe UFOs exist, and why.
— Believe? But it isn't a matter of belief, young lady! I stick to facts because I'm a physicist.
— Oh, I didn't know that. And what research center are you

affiliated with?
— I teach at a high school in the city.
— At a high school? But then you're a physics teacher, not a physicist?
— What do you mean?
— My cousin, who's an astrophysicist and teaches at a university, explained to me not long ago that the term physicist normally applies to people who actually work in the field of physics, particularly in research, not simply to high-school physics teachers.
— What insolence! Typical quibbling from arrogant people! I won't discuss it because I have better things to do!
— All right, all right, don't get angry. Tell me what you think about UFOs instead.
— My scientific training prevents me from indulging in wild speculation. So, as I just told you, I stick to established facts. And the established fact is that UFOs exist.
— But what evidence demonstrates this established fact, in your opinion?
— The consistency of all the observations made throughout the world since the dawn of time.
— The dawn of time? What do you mean?
— Yes, because prehistoric man was already seeing UFOs. In fact, they drew them on the walls of the caves they lived in.
— And how do we know those drawings represent UFOs?
— Circles surrounded by rays and cigars entering ovoid shapes—what else could they possibly be but UFOs returning to their space base?
— Uh… yes, but archaeologists see them, I think, as suns and sexual symbols.

— You think! Well, think whatever you like, young lady. I know, and that's the whole difference.
— Uh… yes, obviously. And what about nowadays?
— There are hundreds, even thousands, of sightings every year.
— And what proves that those sightings really concern UFOs?
— The consistency between them, I tell you. They're always objects moving across the sky at incredible speeds and capable of stopping or turning without slowing down.
— Are they all the same shape?
— No, not at all. Some are round, some square, some triangular. Some are elongated like cigars or rugby balls. Others are perfectly spherical or shaped like hats. Still others are like faceted diamonds or have even more complex structures.
— And you find that whole jumble consistent?
— Of course, because shape isn't what matters.
— If you say so… But is there any evidence supporting the eyewitness accounts?
— Of course there is. For example, there are thousands upon thousands of photographs, some showing nothing more than glowing spheres and others showing solid craft.
— And you're sure those photographs haven't been faked or don't show phenomena other than UFOs?
— Their authenticity is obvious. Here, I'll show you one.

The man stood up and walked over to a white wooden cabinet, which he opened. Inside, Sandra saw a disorderly heap of colored folders and cardboard boxes filled with sheets of paper and newspaper clippings. The

pseudo-physicist rummaged through one of the boxes and returned to Sandra, holding out a photograph.
— Look, in this one you can clearly see a squadron of luminous objects hovering above a factory. Look at the geometric arrangement of the formation. Obviously it isn't a natural phenomenon, is it?
— You've studied this photograph carefully?
— Down to the smallest detail.
— But what do you know about photography? I got the impression, when I came in that you didn't even know a modern still camera could record video.
— I've studied photographic optics in books, and that's enough for a scientist, young lady.
— Ah, no doubt, no doubt… May I keep this photograph for a few days?
— All right. Send it back to me as soon as possible. In any case, I have plenty of others like it.
— Thank you. And apart from that, is there any other, even more solid evidence?
— What could be more solid than an object? Would you like to see one?
— An object? You mean a piece of a UFO?
— At least something that came out of a UFO.
— Of course I'm interested. You have something like that?

The man straightened up and this time walked over to a glass-fronted painted wooden cabinet, from which he took a small box. He came back to Sandra and placed it in her hand.

— Judge for yourself.

Inside the box, resting on cotton wool, was an object about the size of a walnut that looked like some sort of piece of lava riddled with holes. It was pink to fuchsia in color.

— Take it in your hand. There's no danger—it isn't radioactive.

Sandra picked it up between her thumb and forefinger. It was hard but light. In any case, it was not lava or stone. She had never seen anything like it.

— Well, what do you think?
— I admit I'm intrigued. But where did you get this, and where was it found?
— The person who discovered this fragment, along with others, entrusted it to me after observing a UFO and its occupants from fairly close range. She told me they looked like some sort of giant leeks. After the craft left, she discovered heaps of objects like this on the ground. She assumed they were fuel residues.
— Is that your opinion too?
— No, because it's too old.
— Old?
— Yes. Notice that it isn't metal. Nor is it rock. It's unquestionably synthetic. And yet it's three thousand years old. In other words, it dates back to a time when synthetic objects weren't being manufactured—at least not on our planet.
— And how do you know its age?
— I calculated it using my pendulum.

— A pendulum? What do you mean? Like the one in a clock?
— A dowsing pendulum, young lady! Haven't you ever heard of dowsing? You seem very ignorant…
— Oh, that kind of pendulum… yes, I know what you mean. But… uh… I don't quite see how… Would you be willing to let me have this object for a while?
— Why not, if you sign a receipt for it.
— No problem. Well, prepare one and I'll sign it. In the meantime, I'll put away my camera and tripod.

After signing the document, Sandra took her leave, thanking the man of science—or at least the man who believed himself to be one. He gave her his business card, on which, as soon as she was sitting in her car, she read: "*Remote detection of lost objects, astrological charts, and return of lost love.*"

Now fully enlightened as to the scientific abilities of this self-proclaimed physicist, Sandra took out her smartphone and called her cousin.

— Kenny? I've just visited a ufologist. A guy who calls himself a physicist but is only a high-school physics teacher, and who practices dowsing and even astrology. A strange guy. Conceited and a little unhinged, it seemed to me. I wonder what sort of teacher he can be and what his students think of him. But he gave me two things: a photograph of UFOs flying in formation and an object that fell from a UFO. I'd like to know what you think.
— I was just about to leave my office. Come over to the house if you like.

— OK, I think I'll be there in half an hour.

□ □ □

It was Elisa, Kenny's wife, who opened the door. The two women hugged.

— Hi, Sandra. Kenny's waiting for you in his office. You know the way.

The office door had been left wide open.

— Come in, Sandra, and sit down. I'm just finishing this. It'll only take me a couple of seconds…

The young astrophysicist finished reading a text, wrote a few words at the bottom of the page, and slipped it into a folder beside him.

— So, show me what you've found.

Sandra handed him the photograph first. Kenny studied it carefully, frowned for a moment, then slowly a smile spread across his face. He placed the photograph on a scanner beside him, made a few adjustments on his computer keyboard, and a few moments later a color copy emerged from the printer. He picked up a ruler and, using a ballpoint pen, began drawing straight lines in every direction. When he had finished, he handed the copy to Sandra. Every line Kenny had drawn connected one of the UFOs to one of the lighting poles in the factory. And all the

lines crossed at exactly the same central point.

— Well, I think I understand: these UFOs are nothing more than some kind of inverted image of the lights. They're reflections in the camera lens…
— Exactly. Nothing mysterious about it.
— Well, there's one mystery solved quickly enough! And yet according to that pseudo-physicist, it was an "established fact," a photograph that proved UFOs exist.
— Next to nothing quickly becomes proof with those people. Does he even know anything about photography?
— I don't think so, although he claimed he'd studied photographic optics in books.
— What nonsense. And what else have you got?
— This. I admit I have no idea what this material is.

Sandra handed him the unknown object. Her cousin examined it carefully, including with a magnifying glass, then spoke.

— I have to tell you that mineralogy isn't my field, any more than crystallography or chemistry. It intrigues me, but I can't give you an expert opinion. Leave it with me and tomorrow I'll show it to a friend who's a researcher at the Institute of Chemistry. I think he'll be able to help us. I'll call you as soon as I can.

□ □ □

Sure enough, the very next day, while Sandra was on her way to visit a second ufologist, she received a call from

Kenny.

— My friend burst out laughing when I explained where the object was supposedly from. He went to get a few chemicals and made another one just like it, only bigger, right in front of me. It only took him a few minutes. I took some notes on a scrap of paper and I'll read them to you: you start by dissolving phenol in formaldehyde; then you pour the whole thing into a certain amount of glacial acetic acid and then add hydrochloric acid. Of course, there are proportions that have to be observed, but I didn't write them down. My friend had put the flask on a device designed to keep the liquid constantly mixed. Suddenly, I saw its appearance and color change. It turned milky, then pink, and solidified. My friend removed the solid mass, which was still a little pasty, washed it with water, and gave it to me. It's the twin brother—only bigger—of your thing that fell out of a UFO!
— Well, I'll be! And did he give you any other explanation?
— He told me it's a phenolic-type resin. According to him, the experiment he performed in front of me is within the capabilities of any young amateur chemist. Apparently you can even find it demonstrated on YouTube.
— Wonderful. So that's a second mystery solved! And to think that guy claimed this object was three thousand years old. He'd calculated that with his dowsing pendulum, would you believe.
— An age calculation done with a pendulum? Well, that certainly puts the systems normally used by archaeologists in the shade! What a clown that guy is. And you told me he teaches physics at a high school? That's rather frightening.
— That's what I think too. But considering where we are

nowadays with some teachers being recruited any old way…
— Sadly, yes. All right, when I pass your place this evening, I'll drop the two pieces of resin into your mailbox—the UFO one and the one from the Institute of Chemistry, which you'll easily recognize from its size.
— OK. Thanks, Kenny. You've been a tremendous help.

CHAPTER 4

The home of the ufologist R... P... was located in a small village, fortunately not very far from the city where Sandra worked. The man who came to the door was of average height, scrawny, and unshaven. His flat hair was greasy, and he wore a sort of old gray dust coat stained with dark patches. Everything about him made him look like some kind of undertaker. As though he had never seen a pretty woman before, he stared for a moment in astonishment at the captivating young woman of mixed race, then pulled himself together...

— You're the journalist, I suppose? Come in, close the door behind you, and follow me.

The man turned around and, taking small measured steps, entered a dark room containing a large wooden cabinet and a small table on which sat a mechanical

typewriter. On either side of the table were two wooden chairs, each with a rather thin cushion on it.

— Please sit down. Would you like some coffee or something else?

— I'd gladly have an orange soda.

— Ah, sorry, I don't have any. A glass of water, perhaps?

— Yes, that'll be fine.

The little man withdrew. Taking advantage of being alone, Sandra glanced around the room. She first noticed a few magazines lying on the floor near the table. Against one wall stood an old bicycle and cardboard boxes stacked one on top of another. The window curtains, thick but faded, were closed, and the only light came from a floor lamp topped by an old lampshade sitting crookedly. Everything there gave an impression of extreme age and even filth, for layers of dust lay almost everywhere, and the rug covering much of the tiled floor looked as though it had never been vacuumed or shampooed.

The man returned, a glass of water in one hand and a brownish liquid in the other. Sandra guessed it must be cold coffee mixed with milk.

— You wanted to meet me so I could tell you about my UFO research, didn't you?
— Exactly. Can you tell me what you think about these

supposed craft?
— It's rather dangerous.
— Dangerous? But why?
— A lot of very well-known researchers have died because of it.
— Died? But how?
— Sudden or horrible deaths: heart attacks, cancers, ruptured aneurysms, car accidents... what else do I know...
— But everybody dies from things like that. There's nothing extraordinary about it.
— Not in those cases. It was truly mysterious.
— And why do you think those people died?
— Because they had found the truth and talked too much, like the alchemists of old. Not every truth is good to tell, believe me. Especially that one.
— So, if I understand you correctly, those who speak openly haven't understood anything, and those who have understood don't speak or can no longer speak?
— Yes, something like that.
— And what can you tell me without putting yourself in danger?
— That you have to be careful.
— What else?
— Not say too much.
— Yes, I understand that, but what else can you tell me? For example, where do you think UFOs come from?
— It's in the Bible.
— The Bible? How so?
— Well, the infernal forces, you see...
— The what?
— The powers of hell.

— You mean UFOs come from hell?
— In a way. There are diabolical spirits behind all this. And the smell of sulfur from UFOs has often been reported.
— Really?
— Yes. It isn't ozone, as some ufologists have claimed. It has nothing to do with electrical discharges.
— And how did you reach that conclusion?
— I did extensive research.
— Yes, I imagine so, but how did you go about it?
— I read a lot of books. I exchanged letters with witnesses.
— Did you go and interview witnesses?
— Oh no! I avoid going out as much as possible. Too dangerous. And I don't want to meet people who may have been contaminated by infernal spirits.
— But you did agree to meet me...
— Yes, because you told me you knew nothing about the subject. So you're not contaminated.
— Oh yes, that makes sense... Uh, but tell me, who do you think pilots UFOs?
— Nobody pilots them.
— What do you mean?
— Because they're infernal spirits. They move by themselves.
— Oh yes, of course, what was I thinking ? But let's get back to your research. Tell me a little more about it.
— I told you: I've studied many cases and read many books on occultism and magic. Satanism, that's the key! It's everywhere!

The man had uttered those last words with a look that seemed to be that of a madman or of a... possessed

man. At the same time, he had turned his gaze toward a large wooden and plaster crucifix hanging on the wall.

— Forgive me for coming back to this and insisting, but what evidence led you to your conclusions?
— It's because none of it makes any sense.
— What do you mean by that?
— Well, the more you examine cases of sightings or contacts, the less sense it makes. Everything happens as though someone were trying to muddy the waters, to make us believe absurd things. Everything in the accounts is inconsistent.
— Yet just yesterday, a distinguished ufologist explained to me that the proof UFOs exist is the perfect consistency that emerges from all the accounts.
— Pfft! That one hasn't understood a thing. He doesn't know anything about it. He's ignorant. Or else he's been contaminated and is himself part of the plan.
— The plan? What plan?
— The one to muddy the waters.
— Oh yes, I see... Hmm... But could you give me an example?
— An example of what?
— Of this inconsistency you're talking about.
— Think about it! There are countless different descriptions of UFOs and their occupants. Those who have been contacted have received very different answers about the planets these beings are supposedly from. That's to make us believe that all sorts of extraterrestrial races are watching us. Are we really so important that we would arouse such curiosity? No, it's a decoy. The truth is that all these things come from the same place but take on different

appearances each time in order to deceive us.
— Deceive us?
— Yes, about their intentions.
— But what do you think their intentions are?
— Read the Bible again. Genesis in particular, and the Book of Revelation.
— What does it say that you consider important?
— Some of the angels believed themselves equal to God and were cast down into hell. They are the fallen angels who will return at the end of time. And that's where we are now. There are the signs in the sky spoken of in Revelation. These creatures want to drag us along with them, behind them; they muddy the waters and confuse everything. Those who fail to see this obvious truth can understand nothing about the actions of UFOs. They have no pilots, I tell you. They are deceptive appearances!
— Yes, yes, I understand, but, uh... Do you think we have any chance of escaping them?
— Of course, if we are vigilant and ready to fight.
— And what would that involve?
— There are formulas and recipes in old books of magic for driving away evil spirits, the forces of evil. Everything is written down. It's all there. All we have to do is draw from that vast reservoir of knowledge. We must have faith. It moves mountains and is capable of destroying the Evil One. What do you think exorcists do?
— Exorcists? You think they have something to do with UFOs?
— Obviously, except they don't know it themselves. But they're fighting the same forces.
— Do you think there is material evidence for the existence

of UFOs?
— Spirits aren't material and therefore leave only deceptive traces of their passage. Lights here, depressions or holes in the ground there... All that is intended to deceive us even more about their true identity and their aims.
— So photographs are worthless?
— Completely worthless; they're only photographs of fake objects, not real ones. Illusions, mist...
— And the UFO fragments some people claim to possess? Someone showed me one yesterday.

The man opened his eyes wide, straightened up, and recoiled as though frightened.

— Objects? But they're obviously satanic creations. Artifacts straight out of the cauldrons of hell. You have to stay away from them, not touch them.
— Don't worry, I had it analyzed. It was nothing more than an ordinary synthetic resin.
— No doubt synthesized on Lucifer's orders. Enough, Madam, get away from me, get out of here. I don't want to listen to you anymore. Besides, I've already told you too much. You came here to deceive me too and drag me down into the abyss. I should have been suspicious, because you have the eyes and complexion of a ghoul, a female vampire. Get out, I tell you! Go away!

The scrawny little man had become extremely agitated and had seized the crucifix from the wall, holding it in front of his chest with his arms extended. Sandra decided it would be best not to upset the poor man any

further. She stood up, backed away, then headed toward the front door, followed by the shouting paranoiac. She went outside and heard the door slam violently behind her. Then she heard the sound of one key, followed by another, being turned briskly in their locks. She returned to her car, still shaken by what she had seen and heard in the madman's lair.

□ □ □

Sandra headed for the municipal library, where she looked through several books devoted to UFOs. She borrowed four or five that appeared more serious than the others because they contained quite a few bibliographical references and because their tables of contents seemed to offer a relatively neutral and comprehensive view of the phenomenon. She promised herself she would take a look at them that very evening. She would have plenty of time, since her boyfriend, a journalist like herself, had left on a two-week assignment abroad.

She then returned to her workplace. In case the ufologists refused to be filmed and recorded, she had now thought it wiser to carry a USB drive capable of discreetly recording a conversation. She plugged it into her computer, put on her headphones, and listened to the somewhat disjointed remarks of the greasy-haired undertaker. As she listened, she typed a few notes. She then checked the list of people she had already contacted that morning. Tomorrow she had an appointment with another of these ufologists. By now, she knew she could expect anything...

That evening, when she returned home, she found an envelope in her mailbox containing two plastic pouches. The first contained the supposed object left behind by a UFO, and the other contained a very similar but larger object. She went up to her apartment, took off her things, and sat down at the keyboard of her personal computer. She then wrote the following letter:

Dear Sir,

I am returning the photograph and the object you gave me. They have been examined.

The photograph shows nothing more than reflections in the lens, as demonstrated by the geometrical analysis that I am also enclosing.

As for the object, it is an ordinary resin that an amateur chemist can easily produce. As proof, I am enclosing another piece of the same kind of resin, produced in one of our university laboratories.

I hope this will be useful to you.

Sincerely,

Sandra slipped the objects and her letter into a padded envelope, which she decided to mail the following morning.

And indeed, the next day, after leaving the post office, she went to see another ufologist who had explained over the phone that he would show her overwhelming evidence of extraterrestrial visits to our planet and even throughout the solar system.

□ □ □

The man must have been under thirty and occupied the ground floor of a large bourgeois house right in the center of a nearby town. Ordinary-looking but otherwise friendly, he showed the young woman into a room that served as his office. Apart from a special computer desk, there were several shelves holding numerous ring binders. In one corner of the room stood a bookcase containing about fifty modern books. The man sat down in one of those chairs so popular nowadays with video-game enthusiasts and offered Sandra an ordinary plastic chair.

— You told me on the phone that you have solid evidence of the reality of UFOs and extraterrestrials...
— Absolutely.
— But before you show it to me, which I'm very curious to see, I'd like to ask whether you could briefly tell me about your background—that is, why and how you became interested in UFOs.
— Oh, it's very simple. Ever since childhood, I've always been attracted to mysteries of every kind: vanished ancient civilizations, unknown or fantastic animals, ghostly apparitions, parapsychology, and so on. When my interest turned to UFOs, I realized there was an entire mysterious

and fantastic world there that I knew nothing about. So I plunged into it eagerly, reading everything I could find on the subject. And then, one day, I came across a book that was a real revelation to me. Here, this is it...

The man picked up a book from his desk and handed it to Sandra. She read the title: *They Weren't Alone on the Moon*. The author's name was George Leonard. Sandra quickly leafed through the heavily annotated book and saw that it contained a section of lunar photographs. She closed it and handed it back to the man without saying a word.

— This book, as you see, contained photographs taken from NASA's secret archives that the author had managed to obtain. And what made things fantastic for me was that they showed all sorts of structures and craft. So I wanted to dig deeper into the question, and I started looking for other photographs just as fascinating. And I found loads of them!
— Really?
— Yes, I assure you. Here, look at this...

The man turned on his computer, searched around on the hard drive for a while, then began scrolling through images.

— These are all NASA photographs, secret ones of course. Look here at this cigar-shaped craft and there at that dark triangular object. Here, a sort of crane, and there, a dome. But I have even better. Look at these photographs of Mars taken right on the planet's surface: here, a pair of pliers, and there, something that looks like a CD-ROM. Farther on, a

stone that has been cut at right angles. In this other photograph, you can see a sort of face carved into the rock, and there, an actual electrical outlet. But here's the highlight of my collection: look at this flying cigar outlined against Saturn's rings, and here, in front of the Sun, this beautiful lenticular UFO. Now, aren't those solid proofs? These are official documents, after all, and that carries a lot of weight as evidence.

Sandra remained stone-faced.

— But... you don't look convinced?
— No, I'm not convinced at all.
— What? You must be joking! You're incapable of accepting such obvious evidence?
— Obvious? Dear sir, forgive me if I'm going to disappoint you, but my cousin is an astrophysicist. And one day, when I went to his office at the Institute of Astrophysics, I found him laughing with several of his colleagues, all gathered around his computer screen. Together they were looking on the Internet at a website showing similar photographs. I asked them what they found so funny, and they explained it to me.
— And what could they possibly have told you? I'd be curious to hear!
— First of all, the photographs you showed me all have identification numbers. They used to be listed in large printed catalogs that my cousin later showed me. Today they're available on dedicated websites. So, to begin with, there is nothing secret about any of these documents.
— Well, let's say that's true, but it doesn't change anything.

— On the contrary, it changes everything. NASA didn't take these photographs for fun, like tourists who go on vacation and come back with pictures of themselves on the beach or in front of monuments. It took them for scientific purposes. That means that, all over the world, thousands of selenographers, geologists, astronomers, and other specialists examined these photographs extremely carefully, comparing them, for example, when they were taken from different angles, in order to draw accurate maps of features already photographed during previous missions. It is therefore impossible that extraordinary objects like the ones you see could have gone unnoticed by all those specialists. And don't tell me, as others claim, that NASA first retouched the photographs to conceal inconvenient things, because such alterations would quickly have been spotted by specialists. You can't fool a geologist by showing him a rock formation retouched by an artist, no matter how good the artist may be.
— You can fool people if the retouching is done well!
— That's what you say. But first we'd have to know who could have carried out these supposed alterations, where, and in so little time, since these images were always quickly distributed to specialists. Where, then, in NASA's organizational chart, are all those artists who would have had to be hired to examine and retouch so many photographs so quickly? And let me also point out that you're contradicting yourself: if there had been this almost industrial-scale concealment through retouching, how is it that you managed to find so many extraordinary things in these photographs?
— Uh...

— The truth, sir, is that everything you've shown me comes solely from your imagination. Where you saw a crane, a CD-ROM, or even an electrical outlet out in the open in the middle of a pile of rocks, I can tell you that I saw absolutely none of those things.
— Well, I'm certain of what I see. My eyes can't deceive me. I know that astronomers and astrophysicists lie to us. Of course they've seen these things, but they don't dare talk about them. They're bound by the conspiracy of silence.
— All of them, all over the world, without a single one ever rebelling?
— Yes, they all lie, or else they're idiots.
— So my cousin lied to me, or he's an idiot?
— Of course! Maybe even both.
— I'd rather end our conversation here. I can see that simple common sense isn't your strong point.

Exasperated, Sandra stood up, left the room, and headed for the exit. Behind her, the man shouted:

— And you're arguing in bad faith. And you're stupid too! You idiot !

The young woman returned to her car. She wavered between mockery and rage. Mockery at this ignorant guy who thought he knew more than professionals, and rage at the time she had wasted listening to the description of his phantasmagorical delusions.

She picked up her phone and called her cousin.

— Hello, is that you, Kenny? Am I bothering you?
— No. What can I do for you?
— Do you know the book by a certain George Leonard about the Moon?
— Oh yes, that one's practically a classic.
— A classic? How so?
— A classic of stupidity. Just imagine, this guy, who presented himself as an amateur astronomer and claimed to have seen all kinds of artificial structures on the Moon, also said he had spotted them in secret NASA photographs. But the poor quality of his pictures alone showed that they were photographs published in mass-circulation magazines. Nothing like the intrinsic quality of the original images. The guy was obviously suffering from a genuine case of chronic pareidolia.
— From what?
— Pareidolia. It's a term for a kind of optical illusion that makes the person affected by it think they recognize familiar objects in complex structures. Like people who see animals in clouds or faces on jagged rock walls. That Leonard was a crank.
— Well, now I know. You've confirmed what I thought.
— You met some guy who said good things about that book?
— Worse: after trying to convince me to see things that I couldn't see at all, he insulted me.
— Hahaha! You know the saying: a toad's spit can't reach a white dove.
— Anyway, thanks for clearing that up.
— At your service, beautiful...

CHAPTER 5

Around 1:00 p.m. that day, Sandra had an appointment with another ufologist. This one lived in an elegant villa in an upscale suburban neighborhood.

A distinguished-looking and affable man, he led the young woman into a large room on the upper floor of the villa. His office was there, along with his library and two large drafting tables of the kind used by architects. They both sat down in comfortable chairs in one corner of the room.

— Tell me, sir, how did you become interested in UFOs?
— Being an engineer by training, I was deeply puzzled by the descriptions contained in certain sighting reports. They described rates of acceleration and changes of trajectory that defied our laws of physics and seemed to me to make it impossible for these craft to be piloted by creatures like

us. That is why I immersed myself in UFO literature and began experimenting.
— Experimenting?
— Yes. I am an electronics engineer by training, and I wanted to know how these craft could be propelled and how their pilots could withstand the accelerations that had been described.
— And did you get any results?
— I began by collecting accounts, then I came up with hypotheses. One of them was the idea that the pilots of these craft might be insect-like creatures whose outer shells allowed them to withstand accelerations that no human could endure. But this hypothesis seemed to be contradicted by the existing descriptions of these pilots. I discovered fairly quickly that I was not the first person to have been intrigued by this aspect of the matter. Before me, Lieutenant Plantier, Dr. Pagès, engineer Cramp, and Professor Meessen, to name just a few, had conducted research in this field. They all published books or articles on the subject.
— And did they get any results?
— Plantier's book, the first of its kind, was purely theoretical. On closer examination, however, it contained nothing really concrete. The same was true of Cramp and his two books. There were certainly some excellent ideas in them, but as far as I know, no craft ever took off from his place. The same goes for Meessen, who was perhaps even more theoretical than the others. Only Dr. Pagès, in France, was credited with having created models that supposedly flew in front of witnesses.
— Was credited, you say. Did he or did he not obtain any

practical results?
— To tell you the truth, I have never found the slightest evidence that he was able to get a craft operating according to his antigravity principles off the ground. It was said that he had given an astonishing demonstration in front of Russian researchers and that the government of that country had then decided to fund his work. And then nothing more, as though the whole story had been nothing but a hoax. All this happened in the late '50s and very early '60s. Several popular publications, including some intended for teenagers, discussed the supposedly remarkable work of this man, who was a medical doctor or a psychiatrist but certainly not a physicist, nuclear engineer, or anything of the sort, as has sometimes been written. It was announced several times that he was going to receive financial assistance from various governments or patrons to continue his research, but nothing more than a book and a simple patent ever came out of all these claims.
— A patent?
— Yes, filed in 1961. It contained a diagram that was obviously used much later by some crackpot who claimed to have been in contact with extraterrestrials and called himself M.N.Y. or something like that. This crackpot owed his notoriety to the writer Robert Charroux, who discussed him at length in some of his books. In fact, it was nothing but a hoax concocted by a somewhat disturbed mind.
— But that patent does at least exist, doesn't it? So what became of it?
— Well, nothing. Nothing, because a patent, you know, does not always mean very much. It may consist only of ideas and lead to nothing that is actually feasible or usable.

— Oh, really? I thought...
— No, that is a widespread misconception.
— But you also mentioned a book.
— Yes, Pagès did indeed write a book. But that proves nothing either. Anyone can write a book, even one filled with nonsense, and eventually find a publisher. In his book, Pagès claimed to demolish Einstein's theories, no less. He might have been a little more modest... But so many people whose names history will not remember have claimed the same thing... It often means you are dealing with crackpots.
— Yesterday I read that an astrophysicist, Jean-Pierre Petit, had done important work on MHD. What do you think of that?
— Petit presented himself as a pioneer in the field. But far more substantial and constructive work was carried out elsewhere than in Petit's little lab. You should also know that MHD cannot work in interstellar space, which is a serious limitation for a spacecraft, wouldn't you say!
— So, in conclusion?
— I could have told you about a whole lot of other researchers who worked on antigravity or UFO propulsion. All you would have to do, for that matter, is type "antigravity" into Google to realize how numerous they were. H.G. Wells had already dreamed of it with his "Cavorite," a substance supposedly capable of shielding an object from gravitational forces. In fact, all the experimenters, amateurs or professionals working for large companies, have so far achieved nothing very concrete. Antigravity remains, for the time being, a dream.
— And you?
— Well, although I first became interested in UFOs through

their means of propulsion, over the years I had to face the fact that ufology is terribly lacking in concrete, solid physical foundations. What I mean is that all the analyses that have been made of alleged traces, photographs, videos, or even radar echoes have provided no proof of the reality of UFOs, provided those analyses were conducted rigorously. Of course, the popular press and nonscientific books have claimed otherwise, but you only have to go through the serious literature on the subject to realize that none of it is true. You know, some authors and the media have a knack for creating mysteries and then never mentioning them again once they have been solved, or even continuing to talk about them as though their refutation did not exist. That is why so much false information pollutes this ufology that the naive and the dreamers are so fond of.
— So do you still conduct research into a subject that seems to have disappointed you so much?
— I could indeed say that quite a few of my youthful illusions have vanished over time. But I remain active nevertheless.
— Doing what?
— I still subscribe to quite a few UFO magazines, I read a great many books on the subject, and I try to watch as many video documentaries as I can. As I go along, I make index cards and take notes. Then I process this information as far as possible. In short, I think about it a great deal, and I have devoted quite a lot of my leisure time to it. Yet all of this has led me to nothing more than a deep personal conviction.
— Which is?
— I am convinced that extraterrestrials must exist, given how vast the Universe is. And I think some of them may be

coming, or may have come, to visit us, considering that their civilization may be thousands of years ahead of ours. But that is all I can say.

— But how do you explain the fact that these extraterrestrials, if they exist and come to visit us, are described in so many different ways by witnesses who say they have seen them? There are reports of dwarfs with large heads, others with strongly slanted eyes or completely black, faceted eyes like those of insects. Conversely, there are reports of giants with scaly skin, or others so much like us that they could easily go unnoticed riding the subway...

— Yes, I know. To me, it is difficult to explain. It has been calculated, based on the accounts collected, that tens of thousands of UFOs would be visiting us every year. The skies and the space around Earth should therefore be filled with these craft. And yet... that is obviously not the case. It is as though, before landing or coming to abduct Earthlings, they were invisible to the many cameras that constantly scan the sky for scientific or military purposes, as well as to the radars that track even the smallest debris left by our space activities in the space surrounding Earth. That, I think, is where we must look for the key to the UFO mystery.

— But if I understand you correctly, your opinion is based more on an impression or intuition than on concrete facts?

— It would not be wrong to say that. I think they really exist. And besides, it would be wonderful if they did exist! Just think of the scientific leap that contact between them and our greatest scientists could bring us...

— Provided they are peaceful. You just mentioned abductions, by the way.

— Ah yes, that is another facet of the problem. Perhaps the most intriguing, or the most nightmarish.
— Tell me about it.
— Well, as you may know, the first time people talked about flying saucers was in 1947. Later, the term UFO replaced it. Beginning in the early ’50s, individuals claimed to have been contacted by extraterrestrials and even to have traveled in their saucers. In most cases, these claims were regarded as hoaxes or simply as delusions. Then there were a few rare cases of women who claimed to be pregnant by an extraterrestrial, and one famous case of a man who claimed to have been abducted aboard a UFO and forced to make love to a small female creature who had no navel. Until then, all these scattered stories were somewhat anecdotal and were not taken too seriously. Then some researchers developed hypnosis techniques to make people relive their abductions by extraterrestrials. And that was when all sorts of horrific accounts began to appear, involving traumatic experiences bordering on rape, the apparent purpose being to create a hybrid humanity combining Earthlings and extraterrestrials. Some authors even claimed that the highest authorities of certain countries had been informed and were collaborating in these experiments in highly secret underground laboratories.
— Wow! All that sounds pretty hard to swallow.
— Summed up the way I have just done, it does indeed sound enormous—incredible, to tell the truth. But so many such events have been reported, and there is such consistency among the accounts... It is very disturbing. In any case, I would not dare make a definite judgment.

— But couldn't this consistency you are talking about simply be the result of choices made by authors who select and publish the cases they prefer?
— That is indeed quite possible. And I cannot even deny that authors who specialized in these abduction cases may have influenced the accounts of the "abductees" by questioning them themselves, under hypnosis or otherwise. There is, moreover, scientific literature dealing with this kind of influence under hypnosis. In some cases, such questioning even led to court convictions that later had to be overturned.
— If I asked you for your conclusions after quite a few years studying the phenomenon?
— I would be hard-pressed to give you any. But I will try, to oblige you. As I told you, I have a deep personal conviction that UFOs exist and are piloted craft. But where do they come from? I have no idea. What do their pilots look like? Perhaps nothing like what witnesses thought they saw. Who knows whether they might be some kind of sophisticated holograms, designed not to frighten us or, on the contrary, sometimes to frighten us? We would then have to assume that the occupants of UFOs want to conceal their real identity or their true appearance from us. For a benevolent purpose or otherwise? I do not know. Finally, one last possibility would be that we are incapable of seeing them as they really are because our eyes simply cannot do so. Perhaps they exist on a different vibrational mode from ours, in the same way that the beating of some insects' wings is so rapid that their wings are invisible to our eyes. That is all I can tell you. It is not much, I admit. But it is something. I am convinced that we must continue studying

the cases and that one day, no doubt, the truth will emerge from them.
— Before I leave, I would like to ask whether you think there is any material evidence for the existence of UFOs, such as objects that may have been picked up here or there, or even given to "contactees."
— There has been a lot of talk about such things, but in the end it has all proved rather disappointing. There have been questionable traces left on various kinds of ground, such as powders, for example. There have been solid objects, metallic or otherwise, but analyses of them have revealed nothing extraordinary that could have been produced by a technology unknown on Earth. As for the objects that some contactees have claimed to have received, we are still waiting for them to submit them to laboratories capable of carrying out serious analyses!
— And the photographs?
— To date, none has really stood up to close analysis. But then again, how do you expect all the photographs to be analyzed when there are so many of them? That is yet another problem: it is not that there is too little material to study; there is too much of it, and its origin is too often questionable.
— In short, you have a deep personal conviction, but that is as far as it goes: you cannot prove anything.
— Unfortunately, that is correct. And I am honest enough to admit it. Believe me, that is rare. But I will say it again: wouldn't it still be extraordinary if it were true?
— On that point, I completely agree with you.

□ □ □

This ufologist had made an excellent impression on Sandra because of his intellectual rigor. Nevertheless, she could not help thinking that he, too, had a naive side and much preferred believing in his dreams and desires to sticking rigorously to proven facts. For beyond his personal convictions, he had no evidence whatsoever. Nothing but a great void. And the strangest thing was that this intelligent man was content to use that void as the foundation for his convictions.

Back in the newsroom, Sandra took out her USB voice recorder, put on her headphones, and once again began writing notes.

CHAPTER 6

The next day, Sandra entered the lobby of a building, spotted a buzzer, and pressed it.

— Yes? Who may I ask is calling?
— I'm the journalist you have an appointment with.
— Ah! Come on in. It's on the fourth floor, the door to the left of the elevator.

Sandra followed these instructions. When she reached the fourth floor, a man with a baby face and a cheerful expression was waiting for her outside his door.

— Come in, miss.

The man pointed to an armchair and sat down in another one facing her. In a slow, syrupy voice, he began to speak...

— Well, my dear young lady, what would you like to know?
— I've been told that you're a UFO specialist, and I have to write an article about the phenomenon. I hope you can help me?
— Yes, of course! Sanar had already told me you were coming.
— Sanar?
— Yes, the captain of the fourth squadron of the PAREX One group.
— Excuse me...?
— Sanar is the name of one of the extraterrestrials I'm in frequent contact with.
— Oh, really? And how do you contact them?
— Mentally. They speak to me inside my head, by telepathy.
— Oh yes, I see. And what do they tell you?
— They tell me all sorts of things concerning the past and future of our planet.
— And you've never met them?
— Not Sanar, but several of them have lived here, in this apartment, which serves as a sort of base camp for them for a few months.
— Really? But aren't your neighbors surprised by these visitors coming and going like that?
— Of course not, because they go unnoticed.
— Oh, really? How?
— They take the form of cats. You have to love cats, miss, because you never know whether it's a real cat or an extraterrestrial. So sometimes a cat leaves me and doesn't come back. The neighbors aren't surprised. Neither am I.
— But don't you think the cat that doesn't come back might simply have been run over by a car?

— Oh no, they're far too clever for that! They're ten thousand years ahead of us, you know.
— Uh, yes... I understand. But tell me, what has this Sabar told you about Earth's past?
— Sanar, miss. Sanar.
— Excuse me.
— Sanar explained to me that after Atlantis sank beneath the waves—it had been their main base—most of them returned to their home planet. The others founded the Egyptian civilization and built the pyramids. Have you noticed that the Egyptians had a particular devotion to cats?
— Uh, no, that never really struck me.
— So they built the pyramids and the Sphinx, which originally had a cat's head, and beneath it they deposited the archives of Atlantis, waiting for us to find them.
— But why don't they simply give them to us today?
— So as not to reveal their identity, of course. They would be in danger then. You see, although most of them live here in the form of cats, others don't assume that appearance.
— And what do they look like, then?
— They're beings who look like us, perfectly human, but more beautiful than most of us. Their skin is tanned, brown, like yours, but their noses aren't flat like those of Negroes; they're straight, like yours. You see, there's almost nothing to distinguish them from human beings. Except...
— Except?
— Their eyes. Their eyes have a transparency, a brilliance... they immediately captivate your gaze. A little like... yours. Oh my God!
— What is it?
— But you're one of them!

— One of what?
— An extraterrestrial! What joy. Oh, thank you for visiting me in my humble home!
— But I'm not...
— No need! I know you can't reveal your true nature, much less your powers. Rest assured, I'll be discreet. I won't tell anyone. Not even Krivir when he comes back... if he comes back, of course.
— But really, sir, you're mistaken, I...
— I know, I know. I understand everything. Ask me anything you want.
— I simply wanted to know why you believe in UFOs and what proof you have that they exist.
— And you're asking me that? But I believe in them because they exist, don't I? And the proof that they exist is that you're here—you, one of them. It's so simple and obvious.
— Uh... I don't think I'll stay much longer. I think I've got what I wanted.
— But of course, other, more important missions are waiting for you. Wait, don't leave just yet. I'm going to give you something...

The man hurried across his living room and disappeared through a door on the right. He returned a few moments later, still just as excited.

— Here, take this medallion. It contains some fur from all my former cats. Keep it with you at all times. Their energy will be your best protection.
— Uh, oh, all right, thank you. Goodbye, sir.

Sandra hurried toward the exit, followed by the man, who clasped his hands together as she left.

— I will pray for you, beautiful stranger from the constellation Centaurus.

□ □ □

Sandra left, half amused and half furious. So far, only one of the ufologists she had met had seemed sane, although rather naive. As for the others, they were unquestionably nutcases or pretentious cultists. She really felt she was wasting her time. Never had one of her assignments been so uninteresting. She pulled from her pocket the list containing the contact information of the ufologists she had been invited to meet. She was determined to finally find someone who could teach her quite a few useful things so that she could write her article. She came across the only woman's name on the list and decided to call her immediately.

A singsong, nasal voice answered.

— Yeeeesss, who's calling?
— I'm a journalist, and I was told that you're involved with UFOs.
— That's right, yeeeesss, so what?
— Would you agree to give me an interview?
— Meh, why not, if it makes you happy.
— When can we meet?
— Whenever you want. I'm free because I live with my

parents.
— Can I come right now?
— Well, sure, come on over...

Sandra rushed to the address she had been given. It was a neighborhood of public housing. A woman in her forties, wearing a loose dress of an aggressive green, with far too much makeup, wildly disheveled hair, and an irritable expression, came to the door. Once Sandra had recovered from the shock of this apparition, she introduced herself.

— Hello. I'm a journalist, and I've come to see your daughter.
— No, I'm the daughter. My parents aren't here at the moment. Come into my room.

A little surprised by the woman's age, since she had expected someone much younger, Sandra entered a bedroom containing a small bed, a desk, and shelves filled with books.

— Sit on my bed. You'll be more comfortable.

The woman took the chair behind the desk and sat down.

— There. What do you want to talk about?
— As I told you, I'm a journalist, and I need information to write an article about UFOs and ufologists. That's how you can help me.

— Ah, ufologists... Have you noticed they're almost all men? I'm one of the few chicks in ufology.
— And how do you explain that?
— Most of those men are confirmed bachelors. They're into UFOs because they've got nothing better to do. That's all.
— But there are lots of bachelors who do other things.
— Of course. Some masturbate and others do nothing but think about UFOs.
— Uh, yes, I see. And you?
— Me? Well, I masturbate too sometimes, but I prefer UFOs.
— Yes, let's skip your intimate activities. Tell me instead why you're interested in UFOs.
— I find them fascinating.
— Anything else?
— Well, they're fascinating, that's all. What else do you want me to say? It's better than masturbating, isn't it?
— We're getting nowhere! And what do your studies of the subject consist of?
— I'm mainly fascinated by UFOs in ancient times. I spend a lot of time at our city's main library, where I read books written by very ancient authors. It's crazy, the interesting things they describe!
— Oh? Such as?
— Flying shields, glowing globes in the sky, multiple suns, lots of stuff like that.
— Do you have any training as a historian, perhaps?
— Oh no, I dropped out before finishing high school.
— Oh, I see. And you think that's enough to understand what ancient authors wrote?
— Well, sure. You just have to know how to read and have good dictionaries, don't you?

— No doubt, no doubt... And what else do you do besides reading old authors?
— I read quite a few UFO books and magazines to form an opinion.
— And what opinion have you formed on the subject?
— Oh, I've got tons of them! UFOs definitely exist, but the important thing is figuring out where they come from.
— Indeed. And where do you think they come from?
— They're time travelers. That's why their craft don't seem to have evolved since ancient times. They all left from the same point in time where they come from, but arrived at different periods here. You understand? I think I may be the only one who's discovered that. So, since they've discovered a way to travel through time, they obviously come from the future, because we still don't know how to do that.
— That is indeed very logical.
— Isn't it? It's crystal clear! Of course, I don't know exactly when they come from, but at least I know they're from the future. That's something.
— And why, in your opinion, do their pilots so often look very different from one another?
— Oh, that's very simple. It's because in the future Earth will be populated by hybrid races, perhaps even artificially created by our future scientists. Each being will correspond to the function it has to perform in society. It's like ants or bees: each one has a specific function, and they're different from the others so they can perform that function better. That's what I've discovered.
— And what are these bees doing here... uh, sorry, I'm getting confused. I mean, these time travelers?
— They're visiting their past.

— Yes, I understood that, but why?
— Well, that you'd have to ask them. But I think it's for research.
— Research... Yes, why not?
— Right? It's plausible, isn't it?
— But what about the cases where UFO pilots have spoken with witnesses to their landings?
— Well, that's normal. You meet, you chat, then you go your separate ways. That's all.
— That's all, yes, but most of these pilots say they come from another planet or a distant constellation.
— That's probably because our descendants have conquered lots of planets and they come from there.
— And the abductions involving abuse and rape?
— You know what men are like: they see a pretty girl and, boom, they cop a feel! Well, time travelers are the same. It's more pleasant for them than masturbating. At least, I think so...
— Here we go again... But tell me, are you in a relationship, or are you single like the male ufologists you were telling me about?
— I live with my parents, but I do have a boyfriend. It's for hygiene, you see...
— But why do you still live with your parents, then?
— Well, if my boyfriend didn't want me anymore, can you imagine me moving back in with my parents? What would I look like? Whereas if I stay with them, I don't have to move back in. Pretty clever, isn't it?

Throughout this conversation, the female ufologist kept tapping away at her smartphone. Eventually, it began

to annoy Sandra.

— Are you looking for something on there while we're talking?
— No, I'm just looking.
— Looking at what?
— Dunno, but sometimes you come across something interesting.
— One last question: do you spend all day on UFOs?
— Well, yeah, or almost. You know, when you want to work seriously on the subject, there isn't a minute to waste. There's so much to read in libraries and so much to discover on the internet...
— Are you planning to write articles about the subject?
— I already have. Apparently, people liked them a lot.
— Well, I hope you keep up the good work. Above all, don't miss anything that might interest you, and keep a close eye on whatever scrolls by on your smartphone.
— Oh, you can be sure of that. I won't miss a thing.

Sandra got up, left the bedroom, and headed toward the front door.

— Are you going to quote me in your article? Was I good? You know, I've got all the time in the world to answer your questions. Aren't you going to take a picture of me for your article?
— I don't know yet whether I'm going to quote you. Maybe. You never know. If I do, I'll come back and take your picture. Thanks for having me, anyway.
— No problem. See you soon for the picture, then.

Sandra left the public housing apartment. This time, she was more than irritated. She now understood what her cousin had meant when he said, “Have a nice trip through the madhouse.” She looked at her watch. She still had time to grab a bite to eat and then go to a lecture given by "a big name" in ufology...

□ □ □

Although the room was small, it was far from packed. There were perhaps only twenty people scattered here and there on uncomfortable chairs arranged in rows on either side of a central aisle, facing an ordinary table on which sat a slide projector.

The speaker finally arrived. He was thin, with sharply chiseled features and eyes deeply set in their sockets. He placed a folder on the table and immediately began to speak. Although the man was a high-school philosophy teacher, he was certainly no good speaker. His monotonous speech was peppered with endless "actually," "uh," and "you know!

Before long, he cited a case that was "solid and perfect," according to him, because in addition to the witness, there were traces on the ground and chemical analyses of vegetation samples collected by police officers. It happened in France.

The specialist then announced that he was going to show a picture of the traces, walked over to the projector,

and failed to turn it on. A very old lady in the front row raised her cane and pointed to the plug at the end of the electrical cord.

— Wouldn't it work better if you plugged it in?

A ripple of amusement went through the room. Looking somewhat lost, the philosopher bent down, seemed surprised, then asked the organizers for help finding an outlet and an extension cord. This resulted in a long pause.

Once the machine was finally plugged in, it came on, and the first slide was inserted into the tray. Just his luck, it was the wrong way around. The speaker removed the tray from the projector, turned the slide around, and tried again. He repeated the process several times in succession without ever managing to get the slide the right way up. Once again, one of the organizers had to intervene.

Three empty seats away, to Sandra's right at the end of the row, a man in his fifties could not stop himself from muttering:

— What an idiot!

Sandra turned her head toward him, and he toward her. They exchanged amused smiles.

The speaker then described the appearance of the UFO and that of the traces. He went on to explain that a renowned scientist had found indisputable evidence in the

vegetation samples that it had been subjected to some unknown form of stress.

Unable to stand it any longer and visibly exasperated, Sandra's neighbor to the right, who had earlier muttered "What an idiot!", interrupted the speaker.

— Come on, what are you talking about? Those who know the inside story of this case are perfectly well aware that this black mark on the concrete was caused by a motorcycle tire skidding and that the fact that the results observed on the vegetation did not vary according to the square of the distance indicated not an influence exerted at a distance by an object, but rather the direct consequences of the witness's tinkering around in his garden!
— Oh, really? I'm sorry, I didn't know.
— Just like your projector earlier!

The whole room burst out laughing. In the second row on the left, a man stood up, saying loudly:

— This is a joke!

And he immediately left the room, followed by two or three other people here and there. Sandra's neighbor also stood up and left. Sandra saw no point in staying either, so she followed the unknown man out. On leaving the building, he headed left and she headed right. She nevertheless called out to him:

— Thank you! Thank you on behalf of everyone.

— You're welcome, replied the stranger, who did not seem inclined to linger...

This could not go on. Sandra no longer had any desire to waste her time interviewing nutcases and morons or attending conferences like this one. From now on, she wanted to meet intelligent, educated people who could talk seriously to her about the subject. Otherwise, how could she ever manage to write the serious article her boss had asked her to produce?

□ □ □

Still thinking, she returned to her car, parked two streets away, and sat down inside. She turned the problem over in her mind for a little while longer and, out of frustration, called her cousin.

— Kenny? It's Sandra. Frankly, I can't take any more. I'm discouraged. This has never happened to me before. My investigation isn't getting anywhere. So far, I've met nothing but idiots and one apparently serious man who was filled with convictions but had nothing solid to offer me. And now I've just come out of a lecture given by a recognized UFO specialist who seemed not only completely out of it but totally ignorant of things that others, in the room or elsewhere, apparently knew perfectly well.
— And what did you expect?
— I don't know. I thought I'd at least come across people more serious than these. It's appalling. And to think that some of these people write books and articles...

— What do you think you're going to do now?
— I have no idea. No matter how I turn the problem over in my mind, I can't see how I'm going to write anything serious about this subject. Don't you have any ideas?
— Call that man I sent you to again.
— You think so? But he's the one who gave me that list of idiots.
— I know what I'm talking about. Take my advice...

CHAPTER 7

— Hello? Good morning, I'm the young journalist who contacted you a few days ago and to whom you gave a list of people for me to meet.
— Yes, I remember perfectly well.
— Well, it's a disaster: I've met half the people on your list, and not one of them could help me write my article. They taught me nothing.
— Really?
— Yes, I assure you. One of them talked to me about extraterrestrials disguised as cats and thought I was an extraterrestrial, another sees the devil everywhere, and one woman talked rather foolishly to me about time travelers. Only one seemed well-balanced to me, but naive, because he told me he believed in the existence of UFOs and extraterrestrials while admitting that he had no proof of it. Wow!
— And you're telling me that all this taught you nothing?

— Nothing about UFOs, anyway.
— About UFOs, perhaps; but do you think UFOs are really at the heart of the matter?
— What else could it be?
— Why, the ufologists themselves, of course!
— The ufo... uh... but I'm beginning to see where you were going with this. You arranged things so that I would realize just how much the personalities of ufologists are actually a problem, is that it?
— Exactly. And since ufology can only be what its fanatical followers are capable of making of it... You understand?
— Well played. You got me. I see things much more clearly now.
— Perfect. In that case, we can meet to discuss it, as I suggested. Are you free tomorrow?
— Oh yes, of course.
— Then come by my place around 1 p.m. Does that suit you?
— Yes, that's perfect.
— You have my address?
— My cousin gave it to me.
— So, until tomorrow?
— Until tomorrow, yes, with pleasure.

▫ ▫ ▫

When the door opened, Sandra exclaimed:

— You?! Well, I'll be...
— What a surprise! Come in...

They had recognized each other. They were the two

who, the previous evening, had been sitting at opposite ends of the same row of chairs. This was the man who had exposed the less-than-brilliant lecturer's ignorance.

Sandra entered the house, which from the outside appeared to be a single-story building. She followed her host who, much to her surprise, immediately headed down a staircase. They arrived in a large room, one entire wall of which was glass and overlooked sloping ground.

— I never imagined this house could have a lower level like this.
— It can indeed be surprising. It was precisely with this architectural design in mind that I chose this gently sloping lot, with no possibility of being overlooked from behind. Facing south, this room is therefore particularly bright. It's the ideal place to relax, read, or talk. But right next to it is another room, a very different one. Come and take a look.

Sandra looked through the door that had just been opened in front of her. This room was much darker, filled with shelves and books. There were certainly thousands of them. In one corner of the room stood a large worktable holding a computer, its monitor, several types of printers, and an A3 scanner.

— Your office, I suppose?
— Of course. I like working there in semi-darkness, with a single spotlight illuminating my keyboard. It helps me concentrate. But come and sit over here in the full light. You'll have something to drink, won't you?

— An orange soda, if you have one.
— I'll be back in a moment...

Sandra looked around her. The black furniture contrasted with the white walls, on which several brightly colored modern abstract paintings added a cheerful touch. Two or three sculptures inspired by ancient statuary and a few colorful crystal vases completed the room's decoration.

Rather tall and slender, the man reappeared carrying a tray, which he placed in the middle of the low table stretching between two leather sofas. On the tray were two glasses filled with orange juice, a small carafe containing more of the same, and a tray of petits fours.

— Please, help yourself. I preferred to offer you orange juice rather than orange soda. It's healthier and tastier. I just made it from a few oranges.
— Oh, thank you, that's very kind of you.

Sandra paused briefly, then launched in:

— You really put that lecturer in his place yesterday with his rock-solid UFO case.
— Rock solid: concrete was precisely what had interfered with the vegetation growing here and there. That was the source of the plant stress detected by the analyses. It's incredible: all these people copy one another without checking anything and never consult skeptical opinions, even though they're freely available on certain websites. What's more, they live among themselves, in their own

bubble, and refuse to associate with neutral researchers who simply want reliable information in order to try to make sense of things. The result is that they endlessly repeat and elaborate on stories whose lack of substance was exposed long ago. As for the majority of people who listen to or read what these ufologists claim, they are obviously the first victims of this insane methodology.

— You think all these supposed serious researchers are simply poorly informed?

— Of course not. Some are simply dishonest and make a living from people's gullibility. And then there are the crackpots who also live in their own world and spout all kinds of nonsense.

— Unfortunately, I've met some of those crackpots...

— Precisely. How far have you gotten with your observations and reflections?

— Well, as I told you, I met a few crackpots or, at least, people completely lost in simplistic and bizarre beliefs. They had no concrete, solid evidence to offer me to justify their beliefs, but they were absolutely certain and clearly wanted to convince me. Those people don't know what doubt is, and I got the distinct impression that it wouldn't take much for some of them, already aggressive to begin with, to become dangerous if you contradicted them a little too much. You can sense a certain kind of sectarianism in some of them. Only one seemed sensible to me; but as far as UFOs were concerned, all he had were impressions, desires, or hopes; no proof of anything, but rather the dream that all of it might be true.

— Good summary. Good synthesis.

— You think so?

— Yes, absolutely. I could, however, put it another way, more briefly and more generally: the less they know or the less competent they are, the more certain they are and the less they understand why anyone would refuse to share their certainties.
— That's exactly it. And nothing I saw last night contradicts that, when I went through several books on the subject. Books packed with references to other ufology books or articles published in the ufological press, but nothing from serious studies published in recognized scientific journals.
— And yet, over the years, there have been some high-level scientific publications on the subject by recognized scientists; but as I told you, ufologists ignore them or choose to ignore them.
— Could you give me some examples?
— Well, first there is what was called the Condon Report. It involved a scientific committee bringing together researchers from various disciplines, each working within his own field of expertise on certain aspects of the subject. Professor Condon, who headed this official investigative committee commissioned from the University of Colorado, was a prestigious scientist whose scientific integrity could not be questioned. And yet, through disgraceful maneuvering, a few ufologists managed to discredit him in the eyes of naive people. Condon later had to admit that if he had been able to foresee such things, he would never have gotten involved in the whole affair. As far as scientific literature devoted to UFOs is concerned, one can also mention the essential books astrophysicist Donald Menzel wrote on the subject, as well as the one astrophysicist Carl Sagan coauthored with Thornton Page. As for articles, there

are quite a number of them. They can be found in specialized scientific journals, mainly in the fields of physics and astronomy. But ufologists regard all this with disdain. Most of them have never even taken the slightest look at all these researches and publications.

— But why is that?

— You can't understand ufology without understanding the psychological mechanisms peculiar to ufologists. They are, incidentally, the same as those of all believers, whatever they believe in: enthusiasts of various mysteries, conspiracy theorists, or religious believers. And some of them are downright sectarian, as you sensed. Fear, young lady—that is what lies at the root of the psychological mechanisms that characterize these people.

— Fear?

— Yes, fear, in many different forms and guises.

— Can you explain?

— Well, the most common fear is probably the fear of being alone. Alone in life, of course; but also alone in the Universe. Some people, because of their personality or their obsessions, drive everyone away from them. Their family members have turned away from them, they have no real friends, and even in the workplace they are often left on the sidelines. This loneliness generates genuine anxiety that is often relieved only by the love these people then develop for a pet or by an obsession with collecting things. Some ufologists thus collect huge quantities of newspaper clippings, magazines, and books to fill their loneliness. These things now constitute their real family. They would therefore do anything to increase their collections, even steal. For example, I know of at least one vast private library

devoted to mysteries of every kind that is partly based on acquisitions obtained through criminal acts. These collectors don't accumulate all this literature in order to inform themselves and produce useful studies, but solely to devour its contents as others devour food. They are a peculiar kind of bulimic. And bulimia is generally a sign of profound frustration. Just as these people cannot bear their personal loneliness, some of them cannot imagine that we might be alone in the Universe. So they populate it with UFOs and extraterrestrials, which are simply the angels, elves, or fairies of ages past given a modern makeover. That is the vicious circle in which they imprison themselves.

— I'd never thought about things from that angle. Can you give me other types of fear?

— Of course. Another type of fear that is frequently encountered is the fear of not being recognized and admired for who one is. Those who suffer from this fear are generally perfectly aware that they have failed in life or in their careers, even after obtaining impressive degrees or despite holding a social position that many people would envy. These people always imagine themselves to possess an importance or abilities they simply don't have. However socially privileged they may be, they are therefore uncomfortable with themselves and feel a profound sense of injustice at not being regarded as the geniuses they believe themselves to be. To overcome this injustice and this fear of passing unnoticed through the Great History of mankind despite their supposed talents, these people systematically adopt attitudes intended to make them appear original, different from others, better informed. Their way of existing is also to make people believe that

they possess knowledge unavailable to ordinary mortals. Men and women of this kind therefore sometimes present themselves as "initiates." If these people have chosen UFOs as their way of appearing original, they will claim to know their origins and purposes. They will assert that they have collected exceptional testimonies, possess secret documents, or even extraordinary objects. All of these things are proof, according to them, that they are right and know far more than anyone else. If they give lectures or write books and articles, it is not to pass on seriously established knowledge; it is to convince others that they are right and, above all, that they are more intelligent and better informed than everyone else. This is how these people believe they can enter History through the imaginary grand entrance of their own conceit.

— According to you, if I understand correctly, all these people are, in a sense, their own first victims?

— That's one way of looking at it. These people do indeed shut themselves inside a bubble of self-importance whose true dimensions match their own limitations. In the most severely affected, this can lead to sectarian or even extremist behavior. In the others, it makes them increasingly insignificant and ridiculous as their paranoia develops.

— So they all have their own truth, in a way, and cannot conceive that there might be another one?

— What you say is true, but it's even more complex than that. Indeed, eager to convince at any cost, some of these people won't hesitate to give the facts they gather here and there a little helping hand. They will alter the information they have collected by leaving out certain details or

inventing others. For these people, distorting the truth in this way isn't lying; it is simply simplifying things or smoothing out the rough edges in order to convince more effectively. Their false presentation of the facts is, in their minds, merely a salutary teaching method designed to make the most narrow-minded people understand and accept the things of which they themselves are convinced. Of course, in their eyes, the most narrow-minded people are precisely the skeptics or those who are actually the best informed. What we see here is a complete reversal of reality. But look how illogical these people are: they will routinely claim that scientists are on the wrong track, are mistaken, or are deceiving us. That is what conspiracy theorists say, for example. But at the same time, it is very often in what scientists do, say, or publish that these misguided theorist will find the evidence that satisfies their unbridled imagination. Very often, they will even cite a scientist in support of their arguments, forgetting at that very moment that elsewhere they have declared him incompetent or a liar.

— I noticed that kind of reasoning when I visited a ufologist who thought he could see manufactured objects or landscapes containing artificial structures in NASA photographs. It is rather appalling, since the same documents are sometimes taken as irrefutable proof that extraterrestrials exist and at other times as evidence that their existence is being hidden from us through various forms of image manipulation.

— A sectarian mentality is hardly conducive to logical behavior or reasoning, you know...

— I noticed something else: ufologists seem to be mostly

men, and they often appear to be single. Do you see a reason for that?

— Despite some progress in this respect in our society, there is still a pronounced divide in attitudes. Men generally remain more interested than women in things related to technology and mechanics. Look at how men and women behave in front of a computer or a device with lots of control buttons. Look especially at people aged thirty and over. You'll find that men are more comfortable than women in such situations. Men will therefore be more interested in ufology, antigravity, mysterious traces on the ground, and other things of that sort, whereas women will generally be more attracted to questions concerning health, well-being, and other far less technical matters. What you should understand from this is that people are attracted to some things rather than others according to their upbringing, character, personality, and even their hormones. Things are gradually changing among younger people, and that's a very good thing; but the divide nevertheless persists among a large segment of the population. That is why ufology, with its apparently technical aspects, attracts more men. As for the fact that these men are often single, think back to what I told you earlier about the fear of loneliness, the fear of not being recognized, and shutting oneself away inside a personal bubble...

— I see, yes... But tell me, what path did you follow in this field? The first time I contacted you, you told me that you had been a ufologist but no longer were one. Can you explain?

— Even when I was very young, I read quite a lot of books

and popular science magazines. Then one day, a book about UFOs fell into my hands. I found it a hell of a lot more fascinating than anything I had read up to then. Around the same time, a school friend introduced me to Charroux, and that opened the door to supposed archaeological mysteries. Since UFOs had led me to become interested in astronomy, I read Flammarion and Abbé Moreux. Moreux, astronomer though he was, had also written books about the mysteries of the pyramids, Atlantis, and astral influences. Throughout my adolescence, I thoroughly enjoyed reading books like those. But eventually I realized that the people writing them had fertile imaginations. Imagine my surprise, for example, when I once read in a book by an Anglo-Saxon author that the Maya had probably had television!

— Good Lord, you've got to have some nerve!

— Or be completely nuts. That's how my doubts gradually began. I realized that all this literature seemed to contain a mixture of truth and falsehood. So I increasingly felt the need to sort things out by checking the facts. And the more I checked, the more all my beautiful beliefs disappeared or crumbled away. As I carried out my checks, I made contact with people who had the same frame of mind as I did or who were much further along than I was. And that was how they and I became increasingly aware of the enormous differences between us and the ufologists. The latter were trying to confirm their preconceived ideas or adolescent dreams, while we were simply trying to distinguish truth from falsehood.

— And falsehood won out?

— In my view, former French ufologist Michel Monnerie explained it best. In one of his two books devoted to UFOs,

he wrote that, seen from a distance, ufology looks like a monument. But as you move closer to study it, you realize that all you have before you is a pile of rubble. It's a very beautiful image of what the situation really is: the less attention you pay to the details, the more solid and impressive the whole ufological edifice appears. But when you begin looking closely, when you study the details, you realize that the whole thing is nothing but a dreadful jumble of crazy, preconceived ideas based on flimsy data that have most often been misinterpreted or analyzed from only one point of view.

— To conclude, could you describe for me what, in your opinion, has been the evolution of ufology and, of course, of its followers?

— That's a vast question! But I'll try to answer it as completely as possible...

CHAPTER 8

Sandra and the man sitting opposite her poured themselves a second glass of orange juice, and the conversation resumed.

— Quite a number of books devoted to UFOs mistakenly claim that the whole affair began in 1947 after a private pilot named Kenneth Arnold reported seeing a formation of objects behaving strangely. But in fact, it all began much earlier. As early as the end of the nineteenth century, in fact.
— Really?
— Yes indeed. Even then, numerous science-fiction stories were already circulating, some describing aerial craft with astonishing shapes and capabilities, others actually describing extraterrestrials. And at the same time, people began reporting strange objects in the sky that corresponded fairly closely to what fictional literature was describing at the time. This parallel between science-fiction

stories and UFO sightings, and even UFO waves, has never ceased since then. The release of a movie or publication of an article is sometimes enough to trigger a regional wave of sightings or even a nationwide one.

— So science-fiction probably influenced the birth of ufology?

— Exactly. By 1947, science-fiction literature had already described extraterrestrial craft that were spherical, ovoid, cigar-shaped, or even shaped like two saucers placed one upside down on top of the other. Then came the 1950s. That was when the first accounts by contactees appeared, particularly in the United States but also in Europe—that is, people claiming to have met extraterrestrials and even traveled aboard their flying saucers.

— The most famous was, I believe, a certain George Adamski?

— Indeed. He owed his fame above all to the fact that he illustrated his accounts with photographs of supposedly extraterrestrial craft. It has now been demonstrated that all his photographs were relatively elaborate fakes. It should nevertheless be emphasized that all of them contained such anomalies in relation to the explanations given that they should logically have been debunked very quickly by specialists in the field. Worse still: some of these photographs had been faked using an object so common in that country at the time that one may rightly wonder why several decades had to pass before the object in question was finally recognized in those pictures. It just goes to show that the world of ufology is not only a world of incompetents but also of people who are truly blind!

— I think I read that this object was the upper part of a

kerosene lamp?
— Exactly. But although the matter is obvious, some sectarian minds stubbornly continue to claim even today that this is not the case. At that point, we are no longer dealing with blindness but with stupid sectarian obstinacy fueled by arguments of the highest comic order. We leave the realm of sociology there and enter that of clinical psychology. But let's get back to the general subject.
— Yes, let's leave the contactees, their irrationality, and their boasting behind.
— In 1954, there was an extraordinary wave of sightings in France. They formed the basis of what might be regarded as the first attempt at scientific proof of the phenomenon. The apparent demonstration consisted in trying to prove the reality of the sightings by showing that the places where they had occurred lay along straight lines and that where several of these lines intersected, flying cigars reputed to be saucer carriers or mother ships had been observed. Hallucinations cannot travel in straight lines, the ufologists said, so this proved that the sightings really did involve actual objects. All that remained, therefore, was to declare oneself convinced.
— Isn't that what was called orthoteny?
— Yes indeed. Unfortunately for the ufologists, this beautiful demonstration quickly fell apart. It was the world-famous astrophysicist Donald Menzel who struck the first blow. All he needed to demonstrate its worthlessness were a few mathematical calculations. Later, other elements were added to this refutation, and this theory, which had been presented as an irrefutable demonstration, vanished into oblivion. Not for everyone, however, because there is

nothing more stubborn than a ufologist desperately determined to cling to a dubious idea. That was how, for example, isoscelia and the 33 or 625 harmonies subsequently arose, claiming to reveal other geometrical structures related to UFO sightings. Note that the same frenzy for geometrical coincidences is common to all the pseudo-mysteries kept alive by mystery enthusiasts. Thus, one author found twelve triangles regularly distributed around the globe, all similar to the famous Bermuda Triangle; others discovered that Gothic cathedrals outlined the constellation Virgo on the soil of France; and still others identified zodiacs in the arrangement of certain megalithic monuments. And I won't even mention the vast literature produced by pyramidologists, who see all kinds of mathematical and geometrical oddities in the pyramids and their locations. It would take an enormous book to list them all.

— Yes, I've sometimes read things like that. It's crazy!

— You can say that. And yet it is accepted—what am I saying?—swallowed whole by a considerable number of decent people who believe in it absolutely. But let's get back to UFOs... The 1954 wave, like other much earlier ones, had its principal source in the imagination and incompetence of witnesses who believed they were seeing extraordinary things where, generally, there were only very ordinary things they had been unable to identify. Add to that a few clever practical jokes, including some perpetrated by journalists, as well as the media's desire to keep alive a subject that sold quite a lot of papers, and that more or less says it all. Much later, there was another equally extraordinary wave over part of Belgian territory. Initially

anxious to try to understand what lay behind the enormous quantity of testimony collected at the time by a ufological group, researchers from several Belgian university institutes attended a meeting of that association. They came away completely dismayed and stunned by the lack of scientific rigor in everything they had heard there. That did not prevent the founder of the association from later proclaiming on a French television channel that scientists were joining the otherwise tiny ranks of his members in legions. I will merely remind you that a Roman legion consisted of no fewer than 3,300 men, just to give you an idea of what this man was capable of saying in order to convince people. The association enjoyed success for a few years thanks to its sensational claims, then collapsed miserably, with the media being the first to turn away from the whole affair, from which nothing concrete ever seemed likely to emerge. What people chiefly remembered from all this commotion were the absurd assertions of an already-convinced physicist, which fell apart one after another, either by becoming ridiculous or as a result of his own retractions. Today, nothing remains of this wave, which made headlines around the world, except files through which stubborn ufologists still hope to attain the ufological Holy Grail: the ultimate and definitive proof that their beliefs are well-founded.

— And where does ufology stand today?

— Well, quite a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since those two waves. First came the conquest of space and the various explorations of the lunar surface by the Apollo crews. Explorations that left clearly visible traces on the lunar surface, which have since been photographed by

various probes. That does not prevent conspiracy theorists from continuing to present the Moon landings as faked movies made with the complicity of the American film industry. Space exploration has enabled us to accumulate a wealth of interesting data about the celestial bodies in our solar system and also about the distant Universe. We have also experienced the computer revolution and extraordinary advances in medicine. One can only marvel at so many discoveries. Alongside all that, ufology has not made the slightest progress. It has accumulated no convincing evidence and opened the door to no new scientific knowledge. The value of a science is judged by the progress it makes. By that standard, ufological science, or so-called science, is worthless, because so far it has received nothing but a report card on which one can write a big fat zero.

— And yet, lots of people still believe in UFOs and extraterrestrials.

— Perhaps fewer than half a century ago. Indeed, for the younger generation, UFOs and extraterrestrials belong more to the world of movies and video games than to the real world. The dream is still there, of course, but it has now taken on a rather playful form.

— What do you think the future of ufology will be?

— It will probably have the same future as spiritualism or the Loch Ness Monster. Even today, people still hold séances with turning tables or occasionally see Nessie, as the supposed inhabitant of the famous Scottish loch has been nicknamed. But a handful of eccentrics, visionaries, or hoaxers cannot turn a completely meaningless belief into a science or an objective reality. Ufology will inevitably retain

a few followers whom the media will pay less and less attention to and whom, if the occasion arises, they will one day portray as unfortunate dreamers.

— Let's leave ufology aside. May I ask what you think about the possibility of life elsewhere?

— People commonly say that, given the immensity of the Universe, there MUST be life somewhere else, whether similar to ours or not. They say it as though it were inevitable. Yet this idea takes no account of the extraordinary number of successive chance events that had to occur in one very precise order—and no other, I insist—for the first living cell finally to appear. Mathematically speaking, a succession of chance events occurring in such a precise order could have happened only once. Either here or elsewhere. And if it happened elsewhere, it would remain to be determined through what other chance events the seeds of life could have traveled from there to our planet.

— And what if the appearance of life wasn't due to chance?

— Well, that wouldn't fundamentally change the problem. Indeed, even if the appearance of life had somehow been programmed into the Universe, the successive stages of its appearance would nevertheless remain the same and therefore equal in number, which emphasizes how unlikely it is that they occurred in many different places. Note in passing that, in order eventually to produce human beings, our planet went through several cataclysmic periods during which life almost completely disappeared, only to rise, so to speak, from its ashes in forms different from those that had preceded it. It is difficult to believe that the same cataclysms occurred elsewhere and, above all, in the same

chronological order! But let us even assume that life did develop elsewhere. The intelligence of those beings would still have to have reached at least our level, if not exceeded it, before one could imagine any possibility of traveling across the incredible distances that necessarily separate us from that elsewhere, while taking into account the physical impossibility of traveling faster than the speed of light. As a reminder, it would take more than four years to reach the nearest star to our solar system while traveling continuously at the speed of light—that is, covering three hundred thousand kilometers per second! Of course, science-fiction writers easily get around the insurmountable speed-of-light limit by speculating about instantaneous teleportation at infinite speed or dematerialization at point A followed by rematerialization at point B; but for the moment, that remains purely in the realm of fantasy.

— What do you think of the Green Bank equation?

— That equation is both serious and fanciful. If you mention it in your article, you'll have to explain to your readers that it consists of mathematically expressing the chances that intelligent civilizations might be found in our galaxy. I do mean civilizations. So we are already at a stage far beyond the mere appearance of life. This equation, adopted at a conference of astronomers, radio astronomers, and astrophysicists in 1961 and also called the Drake equation after the man who proposed it, takes the form of a series of mathematically defined factors necessary for the appearance and evolution of life. Each of these factors obviously allows for a wide range of different values. As a result, each individual can evaluate these factors more or

less as he wishes, producing as many final results as there might be researchers tempted to perform the calculation. That is the fanciful side of this equation. One of the results obtained, based on very optimistic estimates for each factor, gives 1. That is us—and no other civilization!
— That's obviously both amusing and not very convincing. And what do you think of the SETI program, which consists of searching for possible artificial signals coming from space?
— Well, despite the constant improvement in the equipment used to listen for these possible signals, the results remain desperately nil. Everything happens as though nowhere in the part of the Universe we have explored is there the slightest civilization that has mastered radio waves.
— All this takes us a long way from the encouraging impressions the media generally instill in people's minds.
— Yes indeed, young lady. And here once again we encounter the fear of loneliness associated with the famous question: are we alone in the Universe?
— Which brings to mind another one: Where do we come from, where are we, and where are we going? But now we're entering the realm of pure philosophy.
— A philosophy that is already rather slanted, once again, because think about it: saying "where are we going?" is not the same as saying "where will we go?" The second formulation can, for some people, imply a concept of life after death.

The man smiled mischievously and fell silent. Sandra understood that there was no point in discussing these

subjects any further. She now knew enough to write her article. She therefore concluded the meeting with these words:

— I'm really glad I met you. I finally have what I need to write my article.
— I'm delighted for you. If you find you're missing anything while you're writing it—a document, text, or photo—don't hesitate to call me.
— Thank you for the time you've given me.

EPILOGUE

Late that afternoon, while listening again on her USB flash drive to the conversation she had had during her last interview, Sandra jotted down a considerable number of notes. And the very next morning, upon arriving in the newsroom, she sat down at her keyboard to write an article for which she already had a well-established outline in mind. Shortly before noon, she had finished it, reread it, corrected it, and polished it. She therefore got up and took it to her boss, who appeared absorbed in some reading and distractedly told her to leave it on the corner of his desk. She then went out to get something to eat.

When she returned at around 1 p.m., she had barely sat down when the phone rang.

— Marcel here. I'm waiting for you in my office.

Not without a certain apprehension, Sandra got up and headed toward the sort of glass fishbowl from which her editor-in-chief watched everything going on on that floor.

— Take a seat. Well, I had hoped to turn you into a good journalist...

Sandra sank into her chair, bracing herself for a severe dressing-down.

— I must have good instincts because I wasn't wrong: your article is terrific! We'll publish it in the next edition. Of course, I'll let you continue handling your fashion and beauty column since you love it and you do it well; but from now on, I'll also regularly call on you for more serious subjects. Well done, kid, you did a great job.

— Thanks, boss!

□ □ □

Delighted, Sandra returned to her desk and consulted a list of addresses of people she was supposed to contact about men's makeup. A subject that was fairly rarely covered and that she thought would be useful to explore.

She made a few phone calls, arranged some new appointments, and went home.

□ □ □

When Sandra's article was published, it caused quite a stir. The "boss" told her about complimentary comments he had received from various quarters. Her cousin called her from the Institute of Astrophysics to tell her that some of his colleagues were discussing it among themselves in very positive terms. It made a nice change, they said, from the usual nonsense the mainstream press habitually publishes about UFOs.

But it was on social media that opinions really ran wild. While some praised the article, others poured out insults and complaints. Of course, as always, most of those who declared themselves convinced confused the quantity of testimony with the intrinsic quality of the clumsy investigations carried out in the field by self-appointed investigators. And above all, they ignored the results obtained when apparently the strongest cases had been subjected to serious verification. Other contributors were more straightforward: they said UFOs necessarily existed because they had seen them. Those people obviously had a very high opinion of themselves. And then there were those who pointed to the immensity of the Universe, which simply had to contain beings like us who wanted to come and visit us. Finally, there were those who, as on every Internet forum, quoted the Bible or the Quran approximately, even though most of them had never read either one in its entirety and nevertheless believed they knew their contents and historical value very well.

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Inside Back Cover

About the Author:

Behind the pseudonym *Jeremy Wong* is a French-speaking author who has devoted many years to the study of UFOs. The characters portrayed here are fictional, but were nevertheless inspired by real ufologists and UFO enthusiasts.